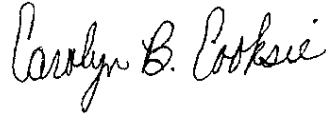


For: FSA Employees

FY 2011 Performance Management Requirements

Approved by: Associate Administrator for Operations and Management



1 Overview

A Background

In September 2009, the Secretary kicked off the USDA Cultural Transformation Initiative: Creating an Inclusive, High Performing Organization (the initiative). The initiative focuses on creating a culture in USDA where all employees are fully committed, motivated, and engaged in achieving the mission of USDA and its Agencies. A fundamental objective of the initiative is to institutionalize diversity, inclusion, and high performance into the USDA culture.

Under the initiative, “diversity” refers to an inclusive environment wherein differences are valued and integrated into every part of USDA’s operation; “inclusion” means equity of opportunity for success and contribution; and “performance” refers to exceeding the expectations of customers. Through the implementation of various USDA-wide action strategies, the initiative provides an opportunity for USDA employees at every level, not just leadership and management, to participate in the transformation process. All employees are encouraged to visit USDA’s Cultural Transformation web site at <http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov> for detailed information on the initiative.

B Purpose

This notice:

- provides guidance on evaluating individual performance results that will reinforce a “results oriented performance culture” in FSA
- announces the mandatory inclusion of the Cultural Transformation and Diversity Roadmap standards into existing and newly created FY 2011 performance plans for all supervisors and managers
- announces the availability of an enhanced Customer Service performance element and standards for **optional inclusion** in existing or newly created FY 2011 performance plans for supervisory and nonsupervisory employees at the Federal and county level.

Disposal Date	Distribution
October 1, 2011	All FSA Employees; State Offices relay to County Offices

1 Overview (Continued)

C Labor/Management Obligations

Where contract language addresses these policies for bargaining unit employees, contract language prevails.

2 Increasing Performance Accountability in FY 2011

A Performance Accountability

Under the Human Capital Accountability Framework (HCAAF) a critical success factor for the Results Oriented Performance Culture is the effectiveness of the performance appraisal process. The effectiveness of the appraisal process relies heavily on the supervisor or manager using performance results to offer feedback, to identify developmental needs to help improve employee performance, and to address instances of poor performance. Supervisory feedback **must** convey how the employee's performance compares with the expectations expressed in the employee's performance plan, and describe the impact of the employee's performance on achieving work unit, county, State, or Agency goals. A supervisor's feedback should take into account the feedback received from the employee's internal and external customers.

B Distinctions in Performance

Employees are expected to satisfy the requirements of their performance standards that are established at the fully successful level. Fully successful performance indicates that the employee's performance satisfies expectations in accomplishing work and achieving goals. Outstanding performance is characterized by extraordinary and consistent work accomplishments that surpass expectations and goals at the fully successful level and yield optimal results for the work unit, county, State, or FSA. In FY 2011, supervisors will be held accountable for making proper and meaningful distinctions in employee performance.

C Exceeding Fully Successful and "Prove Up" Accomplishments

An "exceeds" element rating or a summary performance rating above fully successful **must** be supported by written "prove-up" documentation (Exhibit 1). "Prove-up":

- accomplishments convey how the employee's performance exceeds the standards identified in the performance plan for which an "exceeds" element rating was assigned
- means to provide tangible evidence of surpassing a "meets" (that is, fully-successful) element rating where the performance accomplishments prove substantial results in timeliness, quality, cost effectiveness, innovation, or problem solving that surpasses the standards' description.

To substantiate an employee's "superior" or "outstanding" summary performance rating, supervisors **must** ensure that adequate "prove-up" accomplishments are documented on the performance appraisal.

3 New Performance Standards for Managers and Supervisors

A Performance Standards

To garner commitment and support for the initiative and related action strategies rolled out by USDA this FY, performance standards have been established for all USDA senior executives for FY 2011. In FSA, these performance standards will be **mandatory** and cascaded into the FY 2011 performance plans for **all** FSA supervisors and managers under the “Mission Results” critical performance element. The standards are as follows.

B Cultural Transformation Standard

Supports the Secretary’s initiative for Cultural Transformation through continuous examination and survey of the workforce, customer service, training, and leadership; creates an environment of inclusion, exceptional performance, and effective leadership; and works to eliminate any barriers to operational and service excellence. Actively engages in the transformation of FSA and USDA by supporting process improvements in the organization.

C Diversity Roadmap Standard

Supports the Secretary’s initiative for USDA Diversity Recruitment Roadmap by expanding on mission-specific activities and timelines to ensure diversity recruitment program success and leadership accountability.

D New Elements for Supervisors and Managers on Hiring Reform Initiatives

The new USDA mandates related to the Hiring Reform Initiatives require that all employees with supervisory authority have specific accountability standards related to performance management aligned under the critical performance element for “Supervision” in FY 2011 performance plans. Similarly, all supervisors and managers with hiring authority **must** have specific performance standards related to Recruitment, and Hiring, and Retention and Succession Planning aligned the critical performance element for “Supervision”. See Notice PM-2777 for guidance on applying these new standards in FY 2011.

4 Implementing New Enhanced Customer Service Standards for FY 2011

A Customer Focus and Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is 1 of the measures used to gauge customer service success and effectiveness. At FSA, our customers include members of the public; that is, landowners, farmers, ranchers, Congress, State and local organizations, other Federal Agencies, and internal co-workers and colleagues within FSA and USDA. This FY, FSA is introducing an enhanced performance element on customer service containing new standards. These enhanced customer service standards embrace the spirit, strategy, and objectives of the customer focus and community outreach component of the initiative. Under this component of transformation, USDA Agencies are tasked with several action items, among which includes establishing benchmarks for customer service, developing and evaluating customer feedback mechanisms, reviewing business processes for areas to improve and ensure high-quality customer service, and analyzing marketing/communication channels and strategies to best reach the FSA customer base and increase program participation.

B Enhancing Customer Service

The enhanced customer service standards place greater emphasis on customer “inclusion” by setting the expectation of proactive customer engagement and involvement in planning and reviewing work to deliver quality products and services. “Consulting and Services” and “Customer Relations Management” are 2 aspects of customer service emphasized in the new standards that are vital to achieving overall customer satisfaction. A separate set of standards have been developed for supervisors and nonsupervisors. The enhanced customer standards may be used instead of the standards currently prescribed in 5-PM for supervisory and nonsupervisory employees for the FY 2011 performance cycle.

C Exceptional Customer Service Defined

Exceptional customer service includes, but is **not** limited to, developing innovative practices, techniques, or systems resulting in significant quality improvements in services (for example, reduction in paperwork, processing time), or greater cost effectiveness, or consistently performing exceptionally in delivering superior service to a variety of customers.

D Exceeding Customer Service Standards

An employee’s performance accomplishments **must** “prove up” in both components of the Customer Service element (that is, Customer Relations Management and Consulting and Service) to receive an “exceeds” element rating. See Exhibit 1 for example of “prove up” accomplishments.

5 Enhanced Customer Service Performance Element and Standards for Supervisors for FY 2011

A Customer Service Performance Element Defined

The customer service performance element is defined as follows:

“Conducts on-going reviews and monitors organizational performance to achieve effective customer service results. Actively gathers feedback from customers to identify their needs and expectations. Ensures staff provides responses to organizational leadership, the public, internal and external customers that are prompt, professional, reliable, and address the individual customer’s circumstances. Ensures the delivery of high quality products, services, and solutions. Delegates issues when appropriate, and ensures a final response or completion for the customer. Follows up with customers on solutions, products, and services to provide quality service. Recommends ways to improve performance using available customer satisfaction or trend data. Demonstrates the importance of customer service as a critical component of the Agency’s mission.”

B Customer Service Standards for Supervisory Employees

Customer service standards for supervisory employees are as follows.

- **Consulting and Services**
 - Provides leadership to staff and ensures timely response to assigned inquiries. Fosters solid customer relationships with managers and field staff. Ensures staff responses to customers adhere to expected response timeframes. Responds to e-mails, telephone calls, and voice mails within 24 hours of receipt. The requirement to respond within 24 hours does not mean that the request must be fulfilled within 24 hours, but rather what is required is an acknowledgement that the message was received and expected response date/time are established.
 - Recognizes when follow-up with customer is warranted and initiates prompt contact with customer to ensure that customer is informed of the status of the deliverable/service or that the service provided has been completed to the satisfaction of customer.
 - Provides timely responses to written inquiries, correspondence, reporting and data requests from internal and external customers by established due dates or agreed upon deadlines. Written communication products and materials are, clear, concise, and understandable. Deliverable is accurate and complete to the satisfaction of the customer.
 - Seeks and encourages customer feedback and discussion in program/implementation and evaluations for assigned work responsibility and initiatives. Shows evidence of proactive customer outreach to determine satisfaction levels for programs and services provided.

5 Enhanced Customer Service Performance Element and Standards for Supervisors for FY 2011 (Continued)

B Customer Service Standards for Supervisory Employees (Continued)

- **Customer Relation Management**
 - Understands the internal and external customers' points of view and uses this understanding to prevent and solve problems, and provide quality services and solutions. Solicits internal and external customers' interests and adjusts priorities to meet changing customer needs. Anticipates and meets the needs of customers by delivering and continuously improving quality services. Monitor customer service data. Actively diffuses customer complaints.
 - Reduces number of legitimate complaints by providing timely and reliable technical advice and assistance to internal and external customers on all assigned matters. Advice is based on good knowledge and proper application of Federal and Agency regulations, precedent cases, and relationships among interested parties.
 - Monitors customer service data quarterly and considers options for improvement, if necessary.
 - Evaluate employee recommendations for improved customer relations to determine viability related to cost, efficiency, or quality.

6 Enhanced Customer Service Performance Element and Standards for Nonsupervisory Employees

A Customer Service Performance Element Defined

The customer service performance element is defined as follows:

“Actively gathers feedback from customers to identify their needs and expectations. Provides responses to the customer that are prompt, consistent, professional, and address the individual customer’s circumstances. Exercising sound judgment; identifies information to be shared with customers. Refers issues when appropriate, and ensures a final response or completion for the customer. Follows up with customers on products and services to provide quality service. Recommends ways to improve performance using available customer satisfaction or trend data. Demonstrates the importance of customer service as a critical component of the Agency’s mission.”

6 Enhanced Customer Service Performance Element and Standards for Nonsupervisory Employees (Continued)

B Nonsupervisory Standards for Customer Service

Customer service standards for nonsupervisory employees are as follows.

- **Consulting and Services:**

- Fosters solid customer relationships with managers and field staff. Responds timely to assigned inquiries.
- Responds to e-mails and voice mails within 24 hours of receipt. The requirement to respond within 24 hours does not mean that the request must be fulfilled within 24 hours, but rather what is required is an acknowledgement that the message was received and expected response date/time are established.
- Recognizes when follow-up with customer is warranted and initiates prompt contact with customer to ensure that customer is informed of the status of the deliverable/service. Ensures that service provided has been completed to the satisfaction of customer.
- Provides timely responses to written inquiries, correspondence, reporting and data requests from internal and external customers by established due dates or agreed on deadlines. Written communication products and materials are, clear, concise, and understandable. Deliverable is accurate and complete to the satisfaction of the customer.
- Seeks and encourages customer feedback and discussion in program/implementation and evaluations for assigned work responsibility and initiatives. Show evidence of proactive customer outreach to determine satisfaction levels for programs and services provided.

- **Customer Relation Management:**

- Understands the internal and external customers' points of view and uses this understanding to prevent and solve problems, and provide quality services and solutions. Solicits internal and external customer's interests and adjusts priorities to meet changing customer needs. Anticipates and meets the needs of customers by delivering and continuously improving quality services. Monitors customer service data; actively addresses customer concerns.
- Reduces number of legitimate complaints by providing timely and reliable technical advice and assistance to internal and external customers on all assigned matters. Advice is based on good knowledge and proper application of Federal and Agency regulations, precedent cases, and relationships among interested parties.

6 Enhanced Customer Service Performance Element and Standards for Nonsupervisory Employees (Continued)

B Nonsupervisory Standards for Customer Service (Continued)

- Monitors customer service data quarterly and makes individual adjustments, if necessary or develops recommendation for improved performance for effective customer service.

C Supervisors May Develop Additional Metrics

For nonsupervisory employees, the metrics in 5-PM, paragraph 24 and Exhibit 8 may also be used where appropriate with the enhanced customer service standards . Supervisors are advised to develop metrics that are suited to the work requirements of the employee's position. Supervisors should consult with their servicing human resources specialist when developing metrics for use with the standards.

7 Additional information

A Policy Revision

5-PM will be updated to reflect all new performance elements and standards for FY 2011.

B Creating New Performance Plans for FY 2011 in EmpowHR

The:

- standards for Cultural Transformation and Diversity Roadmap are available for mandatory inclusion in the FY 2011 performance plans for all supervisors and managers
- enhanced Customer Service performance element and standards are available in EmpowHR for optional inclusion into 2011 performance plans for supervisory and nonsupervisory employees.

7 Additional information (Continued)

C Modifying Existing 2011 Performance Plans in EmpowHR

To add performance elements or standards discussed in this notice to an existing FY 2011 performance plan, in EmpowHR users **must**:

- open up the existing plan by selecting, “**Manage Self Service**”, “**Tasks**”, “**Performance**”, “**Performance Plan**”, “**Existing Plan**”, and the existing FY 2011 plan
- CLICK “**Elements and Standards**” tab
- CLICK “**View All**”, to see all the elements in the plan
- scroll down to the old existing Customer Service element
- CLICK “-” (minus sign) to delete the old Customer Service element
- CLICK “+” (plus sign) to add a row
- on the newly inserted row, CLICK “**Critical**” radio button
- CLICK “search icon” to select the applicable element
- scroll down the list of available elements and select:
 - “**#114 (Customer Service for all Supervisors)**” for supervisors
 - “**#115 (Customer Service for all Non-Supervisors)**” for nonsupervisors

Note: Supervisor may add an applicable “results statement” at the bottom of the element when the system will allow. However, if the existing plan has already been “concurred” by the reviewer, the system will **not** allow the supervisor to add a “results statement”.

- CLICK “**Save**”.

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7 Additional information (Continued)

D Contact Information

The following table provides contacts if there are questions about this notice.

IF located in...	THEN contact...
State or County Office	State Office administrative officer.
Washington, DC, National Office for the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Performance Management Processing• Servicing Personnel Specialist	HRD at any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 816-926-6259• 202-401-0694• 202-205-9057 (TTY).
a branch at any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kansas City, Missouri• St. Louis, Missouri• Salt Lake City, Utah	HRD at either of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 816-823-3145• 800-735-2966 (TTY).

Example of “Prove Up” Accomplishments

Examples of “Prove Up” Accomplishments

Accomplishments are the results or outcomes of job performance (i.e., products or services provided) presented in the context of the achievement of planned goals, objectives or expectations. Regardless of the position, managers should ensure that accomplishments are not vague or ambiguous and do not merely reflect a laundry list of tasks or activities performed. An employee’s accomplishments must be weighed against the standards and the related metrics that are developed for the position.

The following examples are intended to illustrate “prove-up” accomplishments that offer tangible, measurable evidence of timeliness, quality, cost effectiveness, innovative or problem solving results. These are examples only. In the following examples for the Customer Service Element, the “prove up” accomplishment clearly shows the impact of the performance results on the work unit, the county, the state or the Agency for improving customer service or satisfaction.

#1: Non Supervisor Example: Sarah Doe, Secretary/Office Assistant – As the Secretary/Office Assistant for the Hometown County Office, Sarah serves as the first point of contact for the majority of customers serviced by the Field Office. On average, the office experiences at least 10 and 15 visitors/callers per day.

Sarah’s accomplishments for the Customer Service Element are:

Consulting and Services: Throughout the rating cycle Sarah has consistently answered all callers and greeted visitors promptly and provided accurate and reliable service by responding to basic inquiries or referring visitors and callers to the appropriate staff member. Without fail, Sarah acknowledged e-mails and returned telephone calls to customers within 24 hours.

In this example, Sarah’s accomplishments “meet” the fully successful performance expectation to respond to e-mails and voice mails within 24 hours of receipt.

Sarah also designed an effective electronic visitors/correspondence log and tracking system which can be accessed and used by all staff members to record visitor (customer) requests for information and to track the status of replies to written inquiries from customers (i.e., the public, Congressional inquiries, private organizations, or other federal agencies). This log and tracking system has proven to be very beneficial in that the field office was able to establish a customer contact list of existing and potentially new customers in the county, to determine the frequency and types of inquiries most often received and to gauge the response rates of the Hometown Field Office.

In this example, Sarah’s accomplishments show evidence of innovation which had a favorable benefit (impact) for the work unit, and thus the accomplishments “exceed” the fully successful standard.

Example of “Prove Up” Accomplishments (Continued)

Customer Relations Management: Comments and feedback from internal and external customers indicates that Sarah demonstrates polite, friendly, and respectful telephone etiquette and in-person interaction. Customers also indicate that the services provided by Sarah are always professional and the customers’ needs are addressed timely.

In this example, Sarah accomplishes “meet” the fully successful performance expectation to provide timely and reliable assistance.

In addition, data generated by the visitors/correspondence log and tracking system revealed that most customer inquiries were for basic information about programs. Sarah recommended the use of an e-mail subscription service to distribute the county office’s monthly newsletter to existing and new customers which also resulted in cost savings for postage. The e-mail subscription service was implemented in the third quarter of the Fiscal Year and because customers can quickly receive news/updates on programs, the county office has since seen a significant decrease in the volume of inquiries for general information thereby allowing staff to address more complex work matters.

In this example, Sarah’s accomplishments show evidence of problem solving and cost effectiveness. Sarah identified a problem developed a workable and cost savings solution that had a favorable benefit (impact) for the work unit and Agency in improving customer service. In this example, Sarah’s accomplishments “exceed” the fully successful standard.

#2: Supervisory Example: Bob Doe, Supervisor, XYZ Team -- Bob is the supervisor and team leader for the XYZ Team, of the Human Resources Division. The team has fulfilled approximately 500 requests for assistance during this fiscal year. The requests vary from responding to congressional inquiries to initiating or processing personnel actions, such as health benefits enrollments/adjustments and retirements for employees located throughout the nation to providing reports to the Department. The XYZ Team consists of 5 HR specialists and Bob designated at least 2 staff members to service each region; there are four regions.

Bob’s accomplishments for the Customer Service Element are:

Consulting and Services: Bob communicated with employees regularly about the status of their work projects and production either through routine bi-weekly staff meetings, routine one-on-one meetings, or through in-person or e-mail communications in order to stay abreast of pending or satisfied obligations. Bob implemented mandatory use of Sharepoint by the staff so that documents such as replies to congressional correspondence or reports to the Department are readily accessible thus eliminating any potential delays due to the absence of the specialist tasked to handle the request. Under Bob’s leadership, staff of the XYZ Team was required to follow-up with all customers no later than 3 days following their acknowledgement of the customer’s request for assistance or service or product to advise the customer on the status of the request. Bob

In this example, Bob’s accomplishments “exceed” the fully successful performance expectation to ensure staff responses adhere to expected timeframes, to recognize when follow-up with customers are warranted, and to provide timely, accurate, clear and complete responses to the satisfaction of the customer.

Example of “Prove Up” Accomplishments (Continued)

ensured representation and participation by the XYZ Team at all Agency business meetings where future human capital planning decisions were discussed in order to proactively anticipate the needs of internal customers. Customer feedback from both internal and external customers throughout the rating cycle was consistently commendable of the high quality products and services produced by the XYZ Team.

Customer Relations Management: Bob routinely encouraged staff to develop innovative alternatives and solutions by establishing challenging goals and making process improvement a priority for the XYZ Team in FY 2010. Each quarter, Bob randomly canvassed customers to solicit ideas or suggestions for improved servicing and as a result, office hours and employee work schedules were adjusted to increase staff accessibility by customers in the pacific and central time zones. Bob also developed and implemented contingencies as appropriate to ensure deadlines were satisfied, which included cross training staff and actively dedicating time and energy to assignments or tasks in the absence of subordinates to ensure timely completion of customer requests and to achieve customer satisfaction. The implementation of the contingencies provided the XYZ Team greater flexibility to adapt to changing customer needs, particularly for high volume requests or requests involving mass personnel actions.

In this example, Bob's accomplishments "exceed" the fully successful performance expectation because of the results offer tangible evidence of achieving customer satisfaction through timeliness, quality, innovation and problem solving.

Bob engaged his staff to develop a set of standard questions that must be posed to a minimum of five customers per quarter to gauge customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction survey responses were returned directly to Bob for review and findings were discussed with the XYZ Team members at staff meetings or in one-on-one meetings. Survey responses were remarkably favorable regarding products and services, but were critical regarding redundancy in the collection of information from the customer. The Staff recommendations for process improvements were adopted by Bob for implementation which increased XYZ Team's capacity to process personnel actions; XYZ Team processed 20% more actions each month as compared to the previous year. The improvements were recognized during an OPM audit and the cost savings were reported out to the Department resulting in the Agency receiving a Departmental commendation.

There has only been one instance of customer disputes that required Bob to intercede which involved an interpretation of OPM policy related to disability retirement eligibility requirements. As a result of Bob's intervention, the Agency was able to obtain timely validation from OPM on the policy interpretation thereby allowing the Agency to successfully stave off needless administrative litigation by disproving the employee's claim that the Agency violated merit systems rules. Also, the Agency was able to provide timely response to multiple congressional inquiries concerning the employee's disability retirement request.

In the hypothetical example above, Bob's element rating for the customer service element would be "Exceeds" because his prove up accomplishments indicate that he surpassed fully successful in both components of the customer service element: Consulting and Services and Customer Relations Management.